



House Bill 620

County Agricultural Land Preservation Programs – Recertification and Remittance of Unexpended Funds - Extensions

MACo Position: **SUPPORT**

To: Environment and Transportation Committee

Date: February 14, 2018

From: Leslie Knapp, Jr.

The Maryland Association of Counties (MACo) **SUPPORTS** HB 620. The bill would lessen unnecessary administrative burdens on the State and county agricultural preservation programs and increase the ability of county programs to successfully complete preservation projects.

HB 620 provides that the Maryland Department of Planning (MDP) and the Maryland Agricultural Land Preservation Foundation (MALPF) may recertify a county agricultural preservation program for 5 years, instead of 3 years under current law, if they determine that the county program is consistently effective in the achievement of preservation goals. The bill also extends from 3 years to 6 years the amount of time that a county may spend agriculture transfer tax revenue before the county must remit the money to the Comptroller.

Assembling projects for preservation under a county agricultural program can be both complex and time-consuming, especially when the project involves multiple properties. Extending the current remittance time period from 3 to 6 years allows counties additional time to manage more complex projects or accumulate enough funds to afford a purchase that would otherwise be beyond the local program's reach. As the bill's fiscal note states, there is minimal impact on MALPF.

Likewise, extending the time period from 3 years to 5 years for the recertification of county agricultural preservation programs that have proven to be consistently effective lessens an administrative burden on the county programs, as well as MDP and MALPF. It can also limit uncertainty for well-performing programs regarding the recertification process. The bill does not alter any recertification criteria and MDP and MALPF may still choose to recertify a program for just 3 years.

HB 620 makes two reasonable changes to county agricultural preservation programs that reduce administrative burdens and increase the ability of these programs to successfully complete preservation projects. Accordingly, MACo urges the Committee to give HB 620 a **FAVORABLE** report.